

Food for Thought: An Update for Food Operators JULY 2008

City of Milwaukee Health Department | Disease Control and Environmental Health Division
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DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOUR FOOD EMPLOYEES ARE ILL?

Food handlers who are ill with certain symptoms and diseases can transmit disease to others as they work. Privacy is important, but because of the danger of disease transmission, the WI Food Code requires that food employees **report** such conditions to their managers. Managers must then take appropriate actions.

Do you know what these conditions are?

Managers often tell inspectors that they send employees home when they're coughing, or blowing their noses. That's good. Customers do appreciate your efforts to limit transmission of respiratory illnesses.

But less obvious, more private problems such as diarrhea and vomiting are a serious threat to the health of your customers and you must know when employees have those symptoms. Tell new hires and current employees that if they have any of the following symptoms, they must report this to you:

1. Diarrhea
2. Fever
3. Vomiting
4. Jaundice
5. Sore throat with fever
6. Sores or scabs containing pus (such as boils and infected wounds) on the hand, wrist or an exposed body part.

Employees (and managers and owners who handle food!) with these symptoms must not work. It's your responsibility as a manager to exclude them from food handling until they are symptom free. Some conditions require a report to the Health Department as well.

The key to preventing outbreaks is good communication with your staff and sound policies and procedures for calling in and returning to work. If you are a small family business, have a Plan B, in case you are ill and can't perform your regular roles.

If you're not sure about how to handle these situations, take charge before it's too late. Get the information you need, develop a policy and communicate with your food employees now.

INSPECTIONS ON THE WEB

It's nearly a year now since the Milwaukee Health Department started putting restaurant and grocery store inspection reports online for public viewing. Media and public interest in food safety remains high, so the Health Department is looking into ways to make our inspection data easier for the public to interpret and use when making decisions.

We'll be working with industry representatives and looking at the practices of other jurisdictions as we plan improvements. The online reports aren't just for the general public though! If you misplaced your orders and know your inspector is due back, you can log on (www.milwaukee.gov/fi) and find your report.



Tom Barrett, Mayor
Bevan K. Baker,
Commissioner of Health
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ARE YOU READY? EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR BUSINESSES

As this newsletter goes to press, many communities in Wisconsin are in a state of emergency due to the record breaking rainfall and resulting floods. Do you have plans in place to protect your investment and livelihood, employees and customers in an emergency? The US Department of Homeland Security has a website for their program *Ready Business* (<http://www.ready.gov/business/index.html>) that has valuable information about preparedness. The Food and Drug Administration's "Alert" site (<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/alert.html>) also has resources.

Handling the day to day demands of running a business can leave little time for long range planning, and budgets are tight. But many of the things you can do to prepare for events such as floods, power outages, blizzards or robberies are low or no cost and make good business sense.

Do you have up-to-date contact lists? Do your employees know where the lists are? Have you talked to your staff about what to do in case of a fire or hold-up?

Do you have a back-up plan for interruptions in utility services like power, water or phones? You aren't permitted to operate without hot and cold water under pressure or adequate refrigeration, so think about how you can keep food safe and minimize costly shutdowns.

Review coverage with your insurance provider regularly. Do you have a current inventory of your equipment? If you have grandfathered equipment that is no longer code-compliant, would you be able to rebuild with the coverage you have?

Preparing now increases the likelihood that your business will recover quickly from adverse events. You may find that the process helps you think about other aspects of your business and management system that could be strengthened.

RECALLS, RECALLS, RECALLS

Food recalls seem to be a regular feature of the news these days. If you have a product that's subject to a recall, you should be contacted by the manufacturer or distributor directly. However, if you pick up inventory at a cash and carry distributor, you may not be notified.

Visit the website www.recalls.gov to find out about recalls. You can also sign up there to receive e-mail notification of recalls.

When there is a Class I recall, (where there is a reasonable probability that the recalled item could cause illness), Health Department inspectors will spot check to see if normal recall procedures are effective.

TAME YOUR ENERGY BILL & HELP THE EARTH

It takes a lot of energy to run a food business! Refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners, cooking equipment and hot water heaters are major loads, but your business can't do without them. We all have an immediate interest in our cash flow, and a long term interest in the health of our environment.

You can do something good for both by taking a strategic look at the way your store or restaurant uses energy. Wisconsin has a program called Focus On Energy that offers many ways to help you do just that. Check out www.focusonenergy.com/Business for ideas and information about various incentive programs.

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